

THE ATTITUDE OF THE LIBERAL PARTY TOWARDS THE DIRECT VETO.

The National Liberal Federation unanimously adopted the Direct Veto as a "plank" of its platform at the Annual Meeting of the Federation at Manchester in 1889, again affirmed it at Sheffield in 1890, re-affirmed it in the Newcastle Programme of 1891, and again re-affirmed at Liverpool in 1893.

In its Annual Report for 1890, the Executive Committee of the National Reform Union, after expressing satisfaction at the successful division upon the Welsh Liquor Traffic Veto Bill, heartily endorsed "this Parliamentary affirmation of the principle of the Direct Veto."

Resolution passed by the Women's Liberal Federation in London, May 28th, 1891:—

"That, inasmuch as it is now generally admitted that it is desirable to diminish the facilities for the sale of intoxicating drinks to the utmost extent which public opinion will support, this Conference earnestly desires the adoption of the Direct Local Veto."

In May, 1891, the National Labour Electoral Union adopted the Direct Veto as a "plank" of its platform.

"When you have a great, ancient, deep-rooted evil, you cannot cure it by small, temporary, pottering measures. You must have a great and a statesman-like remedy." Such was the opinion of Sir WILLIAM HARCOURT in respect of licensing reform, expressed at Salisbury, on October 4th, 1889. The history of the attempted regulation of the liquor traffic during the past 400 years, shows that the measures which have been adopted to cure the evil which has had its origin in that traffic, have been of this "small, temporary and pottering" character and have utterly failed in their object. Upwards of 200 Acts of Parliament have been passed to regulate the traffic. So futile have these legislative attempts proved, that in reference to recent efforts of Temperance reformers to deal with the evil, Mr. JOHN MORLEY declared that "the Temperance movement in this country is the greatest movement, the most far-reaching and deep-seated movement since the great anti-slavery time." Addressing a large audience upon the same subject, Sir G. O. TREVELYAN said:—"The time has arrived when you should postpone everything to the task of wringing from Parliament the instant suppression, by Imperial legislation, of a vast proportion of the drink shops of the entire country." Members of all political parties are agreed that past regulatory legislation for the drink traffic has been a failure, and that the evil now caused by the traffic demands "a great and a statesmanlike remedy."

As the political party to which men look for the accomplishment of the pioneer work of great social reforms, the task of providing the legislative remedy for the evil of the drink traffic, is one which naturally falls to the Liberal party. The party have recognised this and have accepted the responsibility involved. Prominent members of the party freely expressed views upon the subject, which secured official re-endorsement in the Newcastle Programme. Thus, the nation looks to the Liberal party to discharge a recognised obligation, whilst the Temperance party await the promised reform with anxious expectation.

The evil to be dealt with is a "great, ancient and deep-rooted evil." Since past legislation has failed to check its progress, legislation upon new lines must be tried. The Temperance party have suggested a principle as the basis of such legislation, which is constitutional, democratic and equitable. It is that they for whom the drink traffic was allowed to come into existence and for whose convenience it is continued from year to year, shall be allowed to decide, by a simple majority, whether they wish to have the traffic carried on in their respective localities. The inhabitants would thus be vested with a direct veto power. A poll of a locality would be taken. If a majority of its residents voted "no license," no licenses would be granted during the specified period, for that locality. This principle, of the people themselves deciding the question of licenses or no licenses by a simple majority, is embodied in Mr. Allison's Liquor Traffic Local Veto (England) Bill.

The leaders of the Liberal party have approved of the principle of the Direct Veto. Mr. GLADSTONE's pronouncements leave no doubt that the Premier is convinced of the necessity of placing a Veto power in the hands of the people, and that the Government are prepared to undertake the needful legislation. "We shall promote," said Mr. GLADSTONE in his address to the electors of Midlothian prior to the last General Election, "not only the establishment of a representative licensing authority, but the grant to the people of purely local powers of option, such as shall give them an effective voice in determining the conditions of the liquor traffic even up to the point of providing within properly constituted areas for its extinction." In the course of an address delivered at Chester, on June 25th, 1892, Mr. GLADSTONE said:—"So far as the Liberal party are concerned, they are determined as one man to place in the hands of the local communities the power of putting an end—under fair provisions—of putting an end to a traffic which they believe in a multitude of instances to be detrimental and pernicious in the highest degree to the social and moral, as well as the physical life of the community."

Sir WILLIAM HARCOURT, replying to observations made in the course of an interview with a deputation from the National Scottish Convention, remarked:—"If any locality desires absolute prohibition, let it enact it; and if any desires partial prohibition, let it enact it; and if any desires no prohibition at all, let it enact it for itself. That is our principle—absolute and complete Local Option. Local Option would simply allow people to do in this matter what they like."

Referring again to this topic, in a speech delivered in Manchester, on October 9th, 1888, Sir WILLIAM HARCOURT said:—"In one sense there has always been Local Option, but it has been in the wrong hands. It has been the Local Option not of the community, but of the local Magistrates, and it is because we think that this Local Option has been unwisely and in many cases injuriously exercised, that we demand that the power shall be given to the people themselves, who best know their own wishes and best understand their wants."

In the course of an address delivered in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, on October 8th, 1892, Sir WILLIAM HARCOURT confirmed his previous utterances upon the subject of vesting the people with the power of vetoing the liquor traffic. On this occasion he used the specific term "Direct Veto" in alluding to the power to be placed in the hands of the people. "I will content myself," he remarked, "by saying, that we are firmly resolved that in a matter

which deeply concerns the health, the wealth, and the well-being of the nation, each locality and community should have the right to decide for itself what protection it needs and what protection it desires. That is what I understand by the Direct Veto."

Speaking at a meeting held in the Free Trade Hall, Manchester, on October 27th, 1891, Mr. JOHN MORLEY addressed himself at some length to the question whether, in applying the Veto principle "the views and wishes of the majority are to be expressed directly or indirectly." Up to recently Mr. MORLEY favoured the indirect method—the agency of a specially elected board. It was clear from his remarks at the meeting referred to, that his views upon this phase of the question had undergone a change, and that he was in harmony with the Direct Vetoists. He said:—"The popular wishes on this matter—a matter that goes to the very root of our social life and our social habits—will be better and more effectively tested by a direct answer upon a plain issue, instead of being expressed indirectly through a body elected to deal with all the general questions of Local Government, and on personal issues into the bargain. I say here, what I said in the House of Commons: that amongst other things, it is in the interests of Local and Municipal Government itself, that I for one urge that when the time comes, the question of license or no license, or how many licenses, should be tested by itself, upon a plain, unmistakable issue.

Speaking at Nelson, Sir UGHTRED KAY SHUTTLEWORTH expressed the opinion that some power of remedy for the evil of the Drink Traffic "should be put into the hands of those who were most concerned, and who themselves felt most the pinch of this evil." His own opinion was that "it would be better that this power of the Veto should be exercised in small areas, so that those who are most immediately affected by the grant of a license to an individual house should have a power of Veto in the matter."

Mr. MUNDELLA is a firm believer in the Direct Veto, and would allow the people to exercise it freely in their localities.

At one of the largest meetings ever held in Northampton, on March 23rd, 1892, Mr. HENRY LABOUCHERE remarked:—"I have always held, since I have had the pleasure of being your Member, that the first cardinal principle of the Radical creed is, that in matters such as this, the locality should have the right to decide. Therefore I have always voted for, and have always been in favour of Local Option, with the Direct Veto of the people."

There is no lack of further evidence (were any needed,) that the leading members of the Liberal party are favourable to the Direct Veto, and are willing to confer the Veto power upon the people. In view, therefore, of the declarations which have been made upon the subject by members of the Cabinet, and by prominent members of the Liberal party, and of the repeated assurances of support for the Direct Veto Bill when introduced to the House of Commons, it is incumbent upon all Liberals who regard the social welfare of the country, to accord the fullest support they can to such a Bill. "Our mission," said Sir G. O. TREVELYAN, "is to urge that the time has now arrived when all other political considerations should not be lost sight of, but should be subordinated to the task of obtaining for the people of this country the custody of the morality, the order, and the decency of their own neighbourhood."

Again, at Manchester, in 1891, when stating the three principles upon which the Direct Veto was based, Sir G. O. TREVELYAN said:—"The third and last great principle is that the people may be allowed to act for themselves. No one knows as well as they what they want, and that they should be put into a position to get it. We have tried the other system long enough. What we want is that the matter should be referred, not to a local Justice who has a house in a distant quarter of the town, and not to the County Justice who has a pleasant country house twenty miles off, but that the matter should be settled by the inhabitants of this street, or that village, who, if they had their own way, would not allow to come amongst them that evil which these

Justices would never allow to come within five hundred yards of their Nobility. Until the people take this question themselves into their own hands, the liquor question will never be settled in the highest and dearest interests of the people."

On the 18th March, 1891, when the second reading of the Welsh Veto Bill was carried by a majority of seven in a House of 367, the following Members of the present Cabinet voted in its favour, viz. : Sir W. V. Harcourt, Mr. H. H. Asquith, Q.C., Mr. John Morley, Sir George Trevelyan, Mr. H. H. Fowler, Mr. Campbell Bannerman, Mr. A. J. Mundella, Mr. James Bryce, Mr. Arnold Morley, Mr. G. J. Shaw Lefevre, and Mr. A. H. W. Acland.

COUNTY COUNCILS AND LICENSING.

In the course of a speech in support of the Welsh Direct Veto Bill, delivered in the House of Commons on March 18th, 1891, Mr. JOHN MORLEY thus condemned the suggested transfer of Licensing power to such Municipal bodies as Town and County Councils :—

" It has been contended that they ought to make their Municipal bodies as important as they could, and that, having elected men in whose general character and capacity they had confidence, they ought to leave it to them to settle how many licensed houses there should be in a district, or whether there should be any. But it was exactly in the best interests of Municipal Government that he believed they would be wise in sparing them in their elections from a question so full of perturbing, passionate, and confusing elements as this, and he contended that they would be all the more likely to obtain desirable and capable representatives in their local bodies if they kept the elections free from all excitement of a license or no license ticket. On that point, at least, they might defer to American experience, for it was found there, wherever a Municipal power was the licensing power, that all the issues in an election were subordinated to the one of a license or no license ticket. For his own part, therefore, he thought they could do nothing worse than mix up great questions of local government in a particular locality with the question of 'aye' or 'nay' on a Temperance or Licensed Victuallers' ticket ; for it would deal a deadly blow at the healthiness of Municipal Government."

Referring to the same subject in Aberdeen, on April 19th, 1890, Professor JAMES BRYCE, M.P., declared that after a careful study of the institutions of the United States, he had come to the conclusion that it was better that the licensing power should be vested, not in a representative local authority, but in a popular vote.

All the leading National Temperance Organizations have passed resolutions condemning the proposal to transfer the licensing power to County Councils, whilst County Councillors generally, are themselves opposed to such a transfer.

A system analogous to the suggested County Council licensing system is in operation in the boroughs of Scotland. Its results have been most unsatisfactory ; the proportion of public-houses in Scotland, *pro rata* of population, being practically twice as many in the burghs as in the counties which are under the English system. Public opinion in Scotland is averse to any extension of the burgh system to the counties.